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SCHOOL READINESS

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ALERT

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Date: June 3, 2005

X **Priority Schools**
X **Severe Need Schools**

TO: Mayors, Superintendents, School Readiness Councils, Chair/Co-Chair and Liaisons

FROM: Paul F. Flinter, Chief, Department of Education
Bureau of Early Childhood Education and Social Services

Peter Palermino, Manager, Child Care Team
Department of Social Services

SUBJECT: Nutrition Services in School Readiness Programs

The State Departments of Education and Social Services are issuing this TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ALERT to provide guidance to School Readiness Councils and their subgrantees on the School Readiness component of Nutrition Services.

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

Nutrition services must be addressed by school readiness programs as one of the ten quality components required by the legislation. These requirements are also incorporated in the **Connecticut School Readiness Preschool Program Evaluation System**. Nutrition services include:

- (1) identification of children's nutrition needs;
- (2) the provision of nutritious and safe meals and snacks; and
- (3) nutrition education for children, parents and staff.

RATIONALE

Good nutrition provides the energy and nutrients essential to sustain life and promote physical, social and cognitive development. There is a critical link between nutrition and learning. Tufts University's Center on Hunger, Poverty and Nutrition Policy indicates that *"...inadequate nutrition harms the cognitive development of children in ways that may produce lasting damage."*

Meeting nutritional requirements throughout childhood is essential to full intellectual development. Research documents that nutrition impacts children's behavior, performance, and overall cognitive development. Children require sufficient energy and essential nutrients each day to concentrate on and accomplish learning tasks. Poor nutrition and hunger (even short-term) are barriers to learning.

Early childhood is the prime time to teach children about food and nutrition. A child's day-to-day experiences with food and eating affect the way they think and feel about nutrition, and greatly impact the development of eating habits. Children do not necessarily select nutritionally adequate diets on their own. However, by continually providing young children with positive food experiences, programs can help children begin to develop an awareness of good nutrition and to develop healthy eating habits for a lifetime.

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BEST PRACTICE

Early childhood programs have ideal opportunities to give children positive food and nutrition experiences in a safe, sanitary, supportive environment that promotes healthy growth and development. Programs can provide meals and snacks that meet children's nutrition needs, provide models of healthy eating patterns, provide opportunities to educate parents and staff, and help children establish good eating habits at a young age.

When addressing the nutrition services component, early childhood programs need to think about three critical areas:

- identification of children's nutrition needs;
- the provision of nutritious and safe meals and snacks; and
- nutrition education for children, parents and staff.

RESOURCES

Attached to this Alert are indicators of Best Practice with suggested strategies for early childhood providers. The following materials are enclosed to assist programs in the implementation of nutrition services:

- Child Nutrition : A Focus on Preschool
- Nutrition Questionnaire for Children
- Overview of the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP): Child Care Centers
- CACFP Meal Pattern
- Menu Planning Checklist for Programs Feeding Young Children
- MyPyramid
- MyPyramid Food Intake Patterns
- Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005
- Food Safety Checklist
- List of resources on menu planning, sanitation and food safety, and nutrition education for preschoolers.

An extensive loan library of nutrition resources is located at the State Department of Education in Middletown. For additional information or questions regarding this Technical Assistance Alert please contact:

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